

Ryan
Straschnitzki

My name is Michelle Straschnitzki. I am Ryan's mother. Ryan was left a paraplegic after the Humboldt Bronco's Tragic Bus Crash on April 6th, 2018. It was a night like no other. We were preparing to watch the team play in game 5 of the exciting playoff series with Nipawin. Instead, we got a phone call that there had been a bus crash in Saskatchewan. We had no idea at the time, how devastating the crash was, but rushed home from our neighbours' to wait for news.

We waited for hours to find out the shattering news. We were destroyed in that moment. The crash had claimed 15 lives, at that point. No word on if one of the fatalities was our 18-year-old son. The night was so chaotic and surreal at once. Time stood still. When we finally got the call, several hours after news of the accident broke, we heard from Kelly Fiske, that Ryan was alive. He didn't have much more information than that; I was in shock but so grateful. Knowing so many lives were lost and changed in the very deepest ways has left me profoundly melancholy.

Two nights prior, I had just watched the Broncos play an outstanding triple over-time game 4. It was, hands-down, the most exciting game I'd ever watched. It was the most outstanding game I'd ever seen Ryan play. I'm heartbroken that game 5 never came about. I am beyond heartbroken that my big, beautiful boy will never get to realize his dreams in stand-up hockey. I am so unbelievably devastated that Ryan lost so many beautiful friends that night, and that he remembers the events so vividly. Ryan has near perfect recall of the crash and the ensuing carnage.

I cry daily over all that was lost that night. I'm constantly reminded of the fact that Ryan has no feeling or movement below his level of injury. His spine was shattered at the T2/T3 level of his vertebrae, due to the force of the impact and being thrown through the air, to the cold, hard, winter pavement. His injuries were so extensive, we came to find out later, that we came very close to having to plan his funeral.

As a parent, this is your biggest fear. All of this is a nightmare.

Ryan's siblings have been deeply affected; they are angry, sad, quiet and very changed through the ordeal. My husband Tom and I are doing our best for all four of our children, but we have suffered deeply through these past (nearly 10 months). Our lives were forever altered on April 6th. We have a lot of anger and pain that we tend to lay at each other's feet. Fair or not. I am riddled with high anxiety, so much so that the idea of leaving Airdrie on good roads or bad, gives me panic attacks. I am fearful that my children could be hurt from poor driving. I am extremely fearful that people won't change. I am also fearful that this could happen again. Unless people change.

I am loathe to call what happened on April 6th, an accident. It was not an accident. While I truly believe Mr. Sidhu is genuinely remorseful for his inactions that day, and believe in my heart, that he did not set out that day to destroy 30 families (his own included). I have empathy for Mr. Sidhu and his family. This never should have happened. It wouldn't have happened if Mr. Sidhu had simply stopped, as everyone who drives any kind of motor vehicle should do at a Big Red Stop Sign.

Our house has been completely gutted on the main and walkout areas, to accommodate Ryan's wheelchair. Since July 4th, 2018, we have been living in a hotel. All six of us. And a dog, and a recently rescued cat. Three rooms. 2 different floors. There have been delays, headaches, and simple push-back from our insurance. Jett and Jaden go to their respective high schools each day, and, despite the upset and emotional weight, maintain good grades. They are a year away from Graduation.

Connor just started grade one this year. His school is right by our house. Sometimes, he walks home with the neighbours, and sits on our front porch. On the hockey stick bench outside our door. Not talking, not doing anything. Just missing our house. Our Home. Our family as it used to be. And his friends in the neighbourhood.

The trajectory of Ryan's life has been forever altered. Which is heartbreakening enough. He was a wonderful defenseman to watch. Darcy knew what he was doing. The team was everything to Ryan. To all of them.

Watching him learn to care for a body that no longer cares for him leaves my soul shattered. Every day. He is quiet, strong, stoic, sad, determined, violently angry and often frustrated. He is now a 19-year-old young man, driven to live in honour of his fallen friends; yet also wondering how he will be able to live facing this new, drastically changed life. He faces a very different future. Every day brings new challenges for him. As well as ourselves. We have once faced the very real ordeal of Autonomic Dysreflexia since the accident. In the hotel. His blood pressure spiked. We called the paramedics. In the space of 20 minutes, he nearly had a stroke. **It's that simple** with spinal cord injuries. Simple things to us, are now life and death in Ryan's case.

In closing, Mr. Sidhu, I want to thank you for not putting our families through the pain of a long, arduous and possibly contentious trial. We are grateful.

However, this has been a very long, very painful time for all our family. Not to mention, the Bronco family as we have come to call ourselves. With the conclusion of this sentencing hearing, we fully recognize that the healing can begin, hopefully; however, the stark repercussions of your inactions that day, will live in our hearts and minds until the day we no longer travel this world. My hope is that lessons will be learned, wounds will be mended, and that no other family ever must go through the Hell that this has been. We are broken and it's not over for us.

Im Tom Straschnitzki, Ryan's father. Since 4:58pm on April 6, 2018, 30 lives changed forever and the world. 29 Humboldt Broncos and The driver of the semi. I know Mr Sidhu, did not set out that day to cause a catastrophic mistake, NOT ACCIDENT. But the mistake was made. As we know, you had no intention of stopping. There is no fucking excuse for that. Our teachers, parents and grand parents have taught all of us, red means stop, green means go and look both ways before crossing. Ryans 6 year old brother even knows this, since he was 2. Even knows how to put on a seatbelt. Im sure your kids know this. I do however thank you for pleading guilty to save the 29 families and yours from a long painful court process.

Everyday I look at my 19 year old son, grab his legs he cant feel to transfer from bed to wheel chair or car. He must grab 1 leg with his hands and move it over, then grab his other leg and do the same. You should try this. Legs are heavy. Then uses his arms to transfer over. His arms are now his legs. He has NO feeling below his chest. The frustration on his face and sadness in his eyes is unbearable to see everyday. All you had to do was stop. The look in his eyes tells a story of why the loss of the 16, why. The 13 injured. Why. Why didn't you stop? You didn't even slow down. You were going through that intersection no matter what. Why?

I hope you and your family google Straschnitzki and watch the CBC National on Ryan to see what he is going through since the day you decided not to stop. The lift he needed to move him from bed to wheel chair, the total unbelievable process at Foothills we had to deal with. No one should have to go thru that. If you ever experience a spinal cord injury, you will find out first hand. Brutal.

Ryan has 3 siblings, Twins, Jett and Jaden, brother and sister that are 16 and another brother Connor who is 6. Because you had no intention to stop at a marked intersection, their lives were also turned around. Jett and Connor can no longer go skating on the pond with their big brother. Jaden cant kick the soccer ball around with her big brother. They now help their big brother if he needs something he cant reach or get to. This has affected them tremendously. The looks in their eyes says it all. Alls you had to do was Stop.

I have been in my house, my bed, a total of 5 days since April 6. All 6 of us have been in a hotel awaiting our house to be wheelchair accessible since July 4. We hope its complete by March. You are the end result because of crooked policies, crooked politicians and ~~ISSUE~~ owners. But it came down to you. Alls you had to do was ~~FUCKIN~~ stop at a well MARKED intersection

Tom Straschnitzki